

## A message from the Commissioner

Dear Legislator:

When Washington became a state, most people could not imagine that the vast forests and the abundant salmon could ever be depleted. And they surely could not imagine a Washington with 6 million people.



Today, it's equally hard to imagine Washington a century from now. However, we have important obligations to the 11 million people who are expected to live here in 2050, and to all future generations.

Those obligations include the mandate in our state constitution to manage some of our state-owned lands, and the natural resources on them, to support our educational system. They also include a broader moral obligation to leave future generations the legacy that was left to us – the legacy of productive lands, of clean water, and the opportunity to be inspired by the beauty of our natural heritage.

We currently are not meeting this obligation. We continue to consume more than nature can replace, resulting in a downward spiral in the health of the natural world and our quality of life.

One of the most startling symptoms of trouble is the near extinction of 30 animal species. In addition, every 8 minutes, one acre of land is converted to suburbs and shopping malls. Many of our underwater lands are contaminated, and our shorelines are experiencing a building boom that progressively shrinks public access to our waterways.

If these trends continue, our descendants will inherit a state that would be unrecognizable to us. Because we barely can imagine a Washington so radically different from the one we love today, it is difficult for us to work quickly enough to change the trends of over-development and resource depletion.

In the past 30 years we've recognized the need to protect our natural heritage by passing environmental laws. But these laws have failed to confront the core issue of how we must change our behavior to meet our obligations to future generations. We must be willing to look at all the pieces – policies, governance structures, and funding – that now block our progress.

### Policy issues

In the past, we have turned to laws to protect our environment: the Growth Management Act, the State Environmental Policy Act, the Shoreline Management Act, and the Model Toxics Control Act, to name a few. While these laws have helped, we now know much more about our ecosystems than we did then. For example, we know that development along shorelines contributes to the demise of wild salmon – yet the Shoreline Management Act remains unchanged. We also know that the conversion of forests and agricultural lands to suburbs is growing, not diminishing. Yet the Growth Management Act has not changed. The policies for protecting our natural resources for future generations are policies that barely worked in the past century. They certainly are inadequate for the next one.

### Governance issues

To have coherent policies necessary to preserve our environment, to support our public schools financially, and to meet the needs of a growing population, we will need a coherent governance structure. Today we have one agency responsible for state lands, and another responsible for the wildlife that live on those lands. We have one agency that governs the way we use water and separate agencies for parks, for the protection of Puget Sound, and for the agricultural industry. There is not one place where all of these policies are brought together to best serve the public's interest.

Aquatic Lands  
Enhancement  
Account funds were  
used to acquire more  
than 15 acres of this  
Quillayute River park.



KITTY WEISMAN/DNR

### **Funding issues**

We cannot adequately manage public lands when we seem unwilling to pay for the consistent enforcement of environmental laws, the creation of recreational facilities for a growing population, and the restoration of habitat. The legislature has dedicated only 1.4 cents of our general fund tax dollar to these important issues, down from 2.6 cents in early 1990s. Even that was inadequate.

### **Leadership**

Superficiality will never get us to sustainability. Yet time after time, the public is led to believe that we can continue to compromise the health of our natural resources forever without suffering any consequences. The truth is that the loss of natural resources to development and degradation often is

irrevocable. We simply cannot get back what we let slip away while we nibble around the edges of our natural resource dilemmas.

We have made progress, but it has not been enough to compensate for the impact of our growing population and our growing rate of consumption. That's why we need focused, courageous leaders in business, the media, politics, communities, and schools to build the political will to stop the deterioration of our quality of life and the degradation of the natural resources that belong to future generations.



**Jennifer M. Belcher**  
COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS